

## **A Strategic Plan for Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program – Some Thoughts**

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Background and interests:

Professional interests –

- Resident and Migratory Game Birds

- Habitat management at the local WMA level (CF)

- Habitat management at the state level (State Duck Stamp and the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture)

- Technical level experience with a variety of upland game birds and waterfowl mgmt including the development of an adaptive harvest strategy program for ducks at the national level

- Council and Task Force experience

- Life long avid upland bird and waterfowl hunter, dog trainer

### **HOW TO EAT THE ELEPHANT OR AT LEAST BUTCHER THE CARCASS?**

#### **Pertinent Questions:**

How do we utilize your time, your energy and your interests most effectively in this process?

How does the strategic plan need to be organized to most efficiently frame the issues and highlight appropriate strategies?

How do we define success and how are goals most realistically expressed?

What context do we keep program goals in relative to larger landscape changes that are occurring and will continue to occur?

What is the most appropriate geographic scale to work at?

How do we link in a clear and concise goals and objectives for the program with measurable outputs?

How do we ensure that the needed capacity is in place to deliver the right actions in the right landscapes?

What level of monitoring is appropriate to evaluate program effectiveness especially given other environmental variables and land management activities that influence game bird population trends?

How do we create feedback loops that allow the Strategic Plan to be adaptive and dynamic rather than rigid in nature?

How do we create the greatest leverage with interested partners and related programs?

Should this program support hunter recruitment and retention efforts and in what context?

How can the program support the Department's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy and the goal of conserving important habitats?

How important is it to consider benefits to other species that occur in similar habitat types and does that generate additional support for UGBEP?

**Qualified Observations:**

The process to complete the plan will require Commission action and public review.

Montana has an incredible diversity of upland game birds in a state nationally recognized for its big game resources. That represents a blessing and a curse from a priority standpoint.

Working effectively with private landowners, public land managers, and partners requires good working relationships and those working relationships are built through an investment of time. They are sustainable. They require capacity.

Well-conceived conservation strategies can support focused actions but they don't guarantee success. Success requires commitment. Examples of useable models include the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, nested under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Elk Plan and the MT Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy and Management Plan. When you examine each, not one represents a single agency delivery mechanism.

There are many ways to potentially package this strategic plan and we have considerable technical information that should be incorporated into the document. Rick summarized some of that information for you yesterday. We suggest that by bringing a greater focus to different ecological units and specific geographic areas, we can better define opportunities, limiting factors and cost effective conservation.

Each Council member likely brings expectations and certain agenda items to this process. Your challenge as a group will be how you collectively assemble a set of recommendations that identify the critical elements while keeping those expectations in mind. Those elements will likely include some combination of species and habitat priorities, access considerations, realized community benefits, integration with other state and federal programs, administration and delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. What can we do to help you adequately frame those components?

We have a UGBEP that makes available ~\$650K per year for wildlife conservation activities. That pales in comparison to what the Conservation Title within the Federal Farm Bill can affect in terms of acres enrolled in various programs and how that may drive the status of species like pheasants and Hungarian partridge. How can we be more strategic in linking one to the other?

Finally, we continue to witness change occurring across the Montana landscape – development activities that impact the habitat base, changing climate patterns that may influence both vegetation communities and the upland game bird populations that depend on them, changes in landownership patterns that influence access and public recreational opportunities, and changes in hunter demographics. How should these issues be considered in a strategic plan?

I appreciate your help in this endeavor. This represents a great opportunity to further enhance Montana's reputation as the last best place.